The Teenage Fiction of Nwachukwu-Agbada and Eddie Iroh: The Child Protagonist and Human Development

The proliferation of teenage fiction makes it imperative that critics examine the characteristics and major thematic thrusts in terms of their focus on children. Publishing houses attach much importance to fiction for children and teenagers and most of them have established series, which have also attracted established Nigerian novelists and exposed a host of other relatively unknown writers who now write for children. Fortunately most of the writers have transformed children’s and teenage fiction into a synthesis of the thriller tradition within the cultural milieu of the people and with close attention to child development.

Teenage fiction through the incorporation of the culture of the people thus generates moralistic and didactic narrative channelled towards human development. It is as a result of this quality that several critics have examined the significant features of children’s literature. Africa’s major prose stylist, Chinua Achebe, once confessed with regard to the human development of children that “we are at cosmopolitan centres, and the predominant culture of these centres is from Europe. And so, whatever your own political or ideological position might be, you very soon discover that your child is inheriting...

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all kinds of nefarious ideas about race, about colour and so on.” 2 The implication is that teenagers and children are at impressionable ages and the development of their human attributes in a society that depends on human interaction requires the formulation of relevant ennobling characteristics. Writers of children and teenage fiction thus weave their plots with incidents and events that portray the subtle nuances of human actions and the consequences of their aspirations and motivations.

J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada in God’s Big Toe and Eddie Iroh in Without a Silver Spoon have interestingly woven their plots around the interactions of significant child protagonists in a bid to cast insight on human development. 3 The two novels have been selected for study because their narrative actions blend with the expected reactions of such realistic child protagonists and

... the age factor of the central characters constitutes probably the greatest appeal to readers who [...] are young themselves. It enables them imaginatively to step into these works assuming the identity and the role of the heroes, male or female, becoming in their own right defenders of the nation. 4

Although the characters in the two selected novels are not delineated in a national scope, they reflect certain human tendencies that could be nationally relevant.

God’s Big Toe is the story of Onwubiko, a pampered, only son of an opulent Azu Anuka, owner of a poultry farm, while Without a Silver Spoon is the story of Ure Chokwe, a hardworking, honest son of a poor farmer. These contrastive approaches illustrate not only the relevance of a multi-dimensional re-creation of reality but they also indicate the fact that children are moulded according to social circumstances and filial influences.

Onwubiko is spoilt because his father gives him excessive freedom with both his money and material possessions. This protagonist thus fails to attach importance to academic excellence as he dallies with

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